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Community Compact Application Process Now Open

Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito



Hello, municipal leaders. I hope this note finds you and your communities in good spirits and fiscal health.

[As many of you have heard](#), one of my main initiatives as Lt. Governor has been chairing the Community Compact Cabinet (CCC). The CCC elevates the Administration's partnership with cities and towns and allows the Governor's Office to work more closely with leaders from all municipalities. Part of my responsibility as the chair has been to travel the state and visit your communities, see where you are thriving and hear about your needs. You have taught me just how unique our municipalities are. I have enjoyed this privilege immensely!

With this letter I am happy to announce the next step in the creation of Community Compacts. The website and application page are available at

www.mass.gov/CCC. Last week, each of the 351 municipal executives received a letter from me introducing the website and providing access to the application page. The online application process is quick and easy, and allows both the state and the municipality to benefit from the Compact sooner. Becoming a strong partner with our municipalities continues to be a critical first step in the right direction for our Administration.

You might ask, why become a Compact Community? I believe the answer is simple: all Massachusetts communities want to be the best they can be and implementing best practices helps them attain that goal. This initiative provides all 351 cities and towns with a unique opportunity to get the assistance you need in order to achieve best practices that you might not otherwise be able to. A secondary benefit is that Compact Communities receive incentive points on various state grants, the first being [the MassWorks program](#).

Upon submission, applications will be reviewed by the Senior Deputy Commissioner of Local Services, Sean Cronin, and shared with the relevant state secretariat. The purpose of the review is to ensure that the best practice(s) chosen are unique to the municipality and reflect needed areas of improvement. After review, the Division of Local Services will reach out to the community regarding next steps.

I encourage any community that is striving for greatness or is in need of support to apply for a compact. Our team and I will work with you every step of the way to complete your municipality's application and to provide the technical assistance that you will need to accomplish the chosen best practice(s).

I look forward to engaging in this process with you all and visiting your community to sign your compact! And best of luck with the FY15 close-out and FY16 opening.

Help Us Identify and Address Municipal Regulatory Burdens

Secretary Kristen Lepore - Executive Office for Administration and Finance

On March 31st, [Governor Baker signed an Executive Order](#) initiating a year-long review of all Massachusetts regulations. Over the past two months, my office established clear lines of communication throughout the executive branch, developed an extensive internal database of all existing regulations and is now putting the finishing touches on an elite team of subject matter experts from across state government.

When the Governor and I made this announcement, we said our goals were to make sure that state government speaks with one voice and that this review will make Massachusetts a better place for job creation, business

development and managing local affairs. An essential step towards achieving those goals is gathering feedback from both the business community and from local officials, the very groups that are affected by state regulations on a daily basis.

To that end, we have established an online portal to solicit feedback. I know many of you submitted information as part of Lieutenant Governor Polito's survey question back in April, but I am hoping that you will consider sharing your thoughts specifically about the regulations that impact your community.

Regulatory Review Portal: <http://1.usa.gov/1f0CyyB>

Thank you in advance for your help. I look forward to both your feedback and a Massachusetts with a much clearer regulatory code.

BLA Releases LA3 Analysis Tool

James Paquette - Bureau of Local Assessment

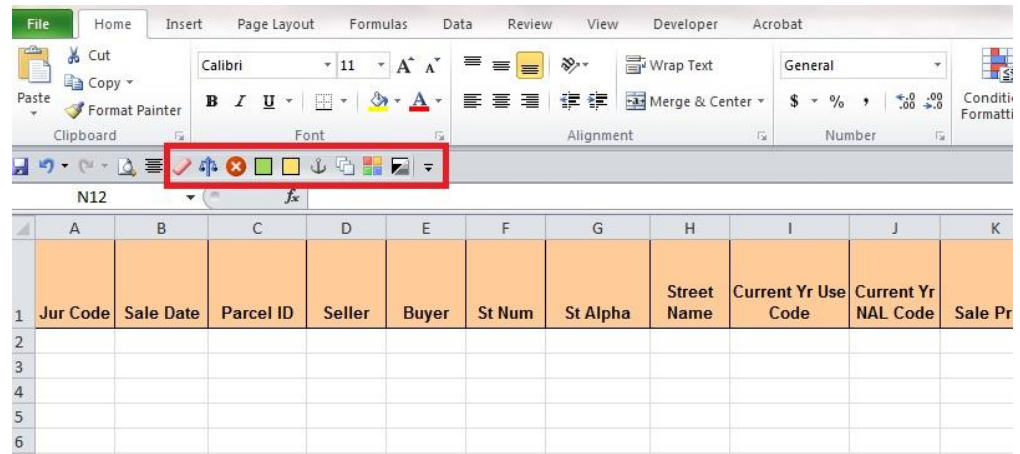
During the past year, [the Bureau of Local Assessment](#) (BLA) has been working with the Massachusetts Association of Assessing Officers (MAAO) to provide the assessing community with an analysis tool used by BLA to review and approve LA3's for certification. Initially, tests were conducted to determine the ease of use of the tools themselves and the effectiveness of the directions for their use. A "train the trainer" session was subsequently completed to prepare MAAO individuals for providing these tools to their membership.

BLA will post these on our website on or about July 1st with the MAAO providing training and support through the MAAO education committee.

The tools in question are a group of Excel macros that perform analysis on the sales and check their compliance with [our Certification Standards](#). Macros are programs (sets of instructions) that run within Excel. These are used to automatically complete a set of tasks. Their use, over the years, has dramatically cut the number of hours needed for analysis. Additionally, since this is accomplished by machine, there is less of a chance for errors.

The materials on our website will consist of an Excel Workbook and a separate Word document as a set of instructions.

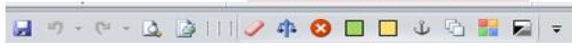
The macros are part of an Excel workbook and assessors will need only to click buttons in order to use them. No prior experience with macros is needed, only a relatively recent version of Excel and a basic knowledge of its use.



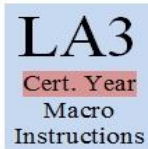
These are the same tools used currently by the BLA to review the LA3 for certification. Their use by the communities will allow assessors to know in advance if there are non-compliance issues - quickly and easily. It is our desire to make this aspect of Certification more open and transparent resulting in a smoother submission and approval process. Additionally, the various analysis sheets point out coding, ratio and consistency issues and can also be used, prior to a change in values, to determine assessment level and consistency.

The Excel Workbook is accompanied by a separate Word document with Step by Step Directions.

Step 1 - Download [LA3 Macros.xlsm](#) to your computer. Open Excel and open [LA3 Macros.xlsm](#). The toolbar in the spreadsheet now has a series of icons representing various macros. NOTE: These will usually appear at the top left hand side of the spreadsheet but may appear above the normal toolbar - as "shortcut icons". If you have other macros on your toolbar, the new macros may appear after the existing ones.



NOTE: Macros 1 - 7 must be used in order.



Step 2 - Copy the LA3 data from your Excel spreadsheet (columns "A" through "Q"). Include NAL explanations located in column "Q". Paste into the [LA3 Macros.xlsm](#) spreadsheet. Do not include your original header. Use the supplied header as seen below that is located in the [LA3 Macros.xlsm](#) spreadsheet.

| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M |
|----------|-----------|-----------|--------|-------|--------|----------|-------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Jur Code | Sale Date | Parcel ID | Seller | Buyer | St Num | St Alpha | Street Name | Current Yr Use Code | Current Yr NAL Code | Sale Price | Prior Yr Assessed Value | Current Yr Assessed Value |

These directions will guide the user through the review process and point out specifics as to what to look for in the analysis. If additional training is needed beyond the directions, or if there are questions regarding the macros, the assessors can contact the MAAO using the information provided on the direction sheets.

FY16 Taxpayer Assistance Program Launched

Bob Bliss - DLS Regional Manager and Director of Strategic Planning

After a successful first year as a pilot program for 13 cities and towns in FY15, the Taxpayer Assistance Program (TAP) has grown to 25 communities scattered across the Commonwealth.

TAP is designed to deliver an earlier setting of a community's property tax rate. In its first year, nine of the 13 communities enrolled succeeded in setting their tax rate before the end of November, before the December rush. Two other TAP communities, while not getting their rates set in November, set them earlier than in previous years; and the remaining two communities were within four and six days respectively of their previous comparable year's performance.

The TAP goal for FY16 remains the same: To set tax rates before December 1, which gives DLS the opportunity to conduct a more thorough review of city and town finances while insuring that local officials are not rushing to stuff tax bills at the end of a busy holiday month.

While one year does not establish a pattern DLS was pleased to set 31 fewer tax rates in December 2014 than in December 2013. TAP can claim some but not all of the credit for this welcome trend.

Over the past two months, DLS field representatives from the Bureau of Accounts and the Bureau of Local Assessment along with me have attended TAP start-up meetings in town halls stretching from Egremont to Dennis.

Of the 25 communities enrolled in TAP - all voluntary - 16 are new: Boxford, Chesterfield, Holliston, Hopkinton, Merrimac and Rehoboth (communities in a property valuation certification year) and Boylston, Dennis, Fairhaven, Framingham, Northbridge, Oxford, Shrewsbury, Sutton, Wareham and Wenham (interim year communities). The nine returning TAP communities are Chelsea and Tewksbury (both in a certification year) and Dartmouth, Egremont, Hanover, Heath, Newburyport, Pepperell and Worcester (all interim year communities).

The centerpiece of TAP remains the creation of a workplan which outlines a schedule that will lead to the setting of a tax rate before December 1. Each TAP workplan begins with an estimate of when a community will have its property value statistics complete through its submission of the LA3 Sales Report, followed by an estimate of a final submit and approval of the LA13, an estimate for the classification hearing date, and then final submission of the LA5 and the Tax Rate Recapitulation Sheet, concluding with an end date for setting of the tax rate.

This simple exercise requires the active participation of a community's assessor and accountant or finance director. Many communities choose to have their treasurer, collector, members of the board of assessors or town manager/chief executive present as well. At these meetings, DLS field representatives provide their advice, guidance and perspective on setting reasonable goals in the workplan.

The value of establishing a workplan cannot be underestimated. It gets everyone who has a stake in the tax-rate setting process on the same page at the outset of the process, and lays out clear expectations and accountability. It is also not a straightjacket. There can always be bumps in the road; indeed, sometimes those potential bumps are identified in the workplan meeting.

It is now too late to enroll in TAP if you have not already done so, but if your town would like to go through this tax-rate setting planning exercise on its own using a TAP workplan, please let me know at blissr@dor.state.ma.us and I will be happy to send you the workplan form, which will include your most recent comparable year's experience in setting a tax rate. Every community in the Commonwealth would do well to consider integrating a TAP-like approach to mapping out a schedule leading to setting a tax rate before December 1.

DLS Employment Opportunity: Bureau of Accounts Director

Bureau of Accounts

DLS continues the search for a new Director of the Bureau of Accounts. For those interested, please note that while regular travel to our Boston office will be expected, day-to-day operations can be performed from either our Springfield or Worcester offices. We encourage interested parties from across the Commonwealth to apply for this important, professional position. The Director of the Bureau of Accounts oversees the tax rate setting process, free cash certification, compliance with Proposition 2 1/2, the Qualified Bond and State House Notes Programs, and plays a vital regulatory role in the fiscal well-being of every community in the Commonwealth. We've received a wide array of interest but believe there may still be additional qualified candidates interested in the opportunity. For more information, please click [here](#).

OSD Available to Assist Municipalities with Building Construction Contract Compliance

Operational Services Division (OSD)

As the [COMMBUYS Enablement Team](#) has been visiting with procurement officials around the Commonwealth, it has come to our attention that some municipalities may not be aware of the [August 2014 Inspector General's communication](#) which outlined new Building Construction Contracts advertising requirements under MGL c. 149. Although we recommend that procurement professionals read the message in its entirety, details related to COMMBUYS posting requirements are summarized below:

MGL c. 149 - Building Construction Contracts

Estimated Contract Amount: \$10,000 to \$25,000

Advertising Requirements: Advertise in the Central Register and COMMBUYS and post a notice on your jurisdiction's website and in the office at least two weeks before responses are due. (See MGL c. 149, s. 44A(2)(B))

Estimated Contract Amount: Over \$10,000,000

Advertising Requirements: Advertise the request for qualifications in the Central Register, a newspaper, and COMMBUYS at least two weeks before responses are due. (See MGL c. 149, s. 44D1/2(f))

While COMMBUYS posting is not mandated for Estimated Contract Amounts between \$25,000 and \$9,999,999, we encourage procurement professionals to post these types of contracts to COMMBUYS as a best practice.

For more information about COMMBUYS or to learn how to take advantage of COMMBUYS functionality for your organization, email the COMMBUYS Enablement Team at COMMBUYSEnablement@state.ma.us.

COMMBUYS Market Center Value at a Glance

[COMMBUYS](#) connects all levels of Massachusetts government with businesses, and links government entities with one another. All procurement activity is performed in the COMMBUYS online portal and available 24/7/365.

Online Market center capabilities enable members to:

- shop and order from more than 120 statewide contracts
- [publish bids](#) and easily reach a pool of 11,218* registered businesses in COMMBUYS
- conduct collaborative solicitations with other municipalities or departments
- receive and evaluate quotes online
- publish public bid award notifications
- electronically store all documents associated with a solicitation
- access purchasing activity against awarded contracts
- collect all ordering and spending data through flexible, sophisticated reporting

Contact the COMMBUYS Enablement Team for more information at COMMBUYSEnablement@state.ma.us.

(*As of June 8, 2015)

June Municipal Calendar

| | | |
|----------------|------------------|--|
| June 1 | Clerk | Certification of Appropriations This is done after City/Town Council or Town Meeting so the Accountant may set up accounts for each department in the municipality. |
| June 1 | Assessors | Determine Valuation of Other Municipal or District Land In certain communities where land is owned by another community or district, the value of the land is determined by the Assessors in the year following a revaluation year, for in-lieu-of-tax payments. |
| June 1 | DOR/BLA | Notification of Proposed EQVs (even numbered years only) |
| June 1 | DOR/BLA | Notification of SOL Valuations (every 4th year after 2005) |
| June 10 | DOR/BLA | Concludes Public Hearings on Proposed EQVs (even numbered years only) |
| June 10 | DOR/BLA | Concludes Public Hearings on Proposed SOL Valuations (every 4th year after 2005) |
| June 15 | DOR | Commissioner Determines and Certifies Pipeline Valuations |
| June 15 | Assessors | Deadline for Appealing Commissioner's Telephone & Telegraph Valuations |
| June 15 | Assessors | Make Annual Preliminary Tax Commitment The preliminary tax commitment must be based on the prior year's net tax on the property and may not exceed, with limited exceptions, 50% of that amount. This should be done early enough for the annual preliminary quarterly or semi-annual bills to |

| | | |
|----------------|------------------|---|
| | | be mailed by July 1 |
| June 20 | Assessors | Final Date to Make Omitted or Revised Assessments As required by MGL Ch. 59, Sections 75 and 76, if a property is inadvertently excluded or mistakenly under-assessed on the warrant for property taxes, it is the Assessors' role to correct the mistake and assess the property correctly. Such an assessment may not be made later than June 20 of the taxable year or 90 days after the date the tax bills are mailed, whichever is later. |
| June 30 | Assessors | Overlay Surplus Closes to Surplus Revenue Each year, any balance in the overlay reserve accounts in excess of the remaining amount of the warrant to be collected or abated in that year, is certified by the Assessors. The transfer from overlay reserves to the overlay surplus is done on the Assessors' initiative or within 10 days of a written request by the chief executive officer. Once in overlay surplus, these funds may be appropriated for any lawful purpose. Any balance in the overlay surplus at the end of the fiscal year shall be closed to surplus revenue and, eventually, free cash. |
| June 30 | Assessors | Physical Inventory of all Parcels for Communities that Accepted M.G.L. Ch. 59, Sec. 2A(a) |
| June 30 | Taxpayer | Deadline for Applying to Have Land Classified as Forest Land, M.G.L. Ch. 61 According to MGL Ch. 61, |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|--|
| | | Section 2, this is the deadline to apply to the State Forester to have land classified as forest land. |
| June 30 | Assessors | Submit Annual Report of Omitted or Revised Assessments |
| June 30 | Assessors | <p>Last Day to Submit Requests for Current Fiscal Year Reimbursements of Exemptions Granted Under the Various Clauses of Ch. 59, Sec. 5</p> <p>If an exemption is granted to a residential property owner, the property tax is lowered, and the city or town collects fewer tax revenues than anticipated. These exemptions are partially reimbursed by the state as indicated under "Exemptions", section B of the Cherry Sheet.</p> <p>It is the responsibility of the Assessors to submit all exemptions to DOR so that the community may be reimbursed for statutory exemptions. If the Assessors fail to submit a request, the community's loss of tax revenues will not be offset by exemption reimbursements from the state. These reimbursements may not be filed retroactively for any year.</p> <p>If tax bills are mailed late, assessors may submit requests for reimbursement until August 20.</p> |
| Final Day of Each Month | State Treasurer | <p>Notification of monthly local aid distribution.</p> <p>Click www.mass.gov/treasury/cash-management to view</p> |

distribution breakdown.

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